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HOW SHOULD HISTORY BE TAUGHT?



BY

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Dedicated

*To My Father George Edwin Emery
Poet, Journalist and Historical Writer*



A NEW TEACHING OF HISTORY

THERE has been a great, an immense change in the writing of history, mainly in the last thirty years, brought about by the researches of scholars and the bringing to light by the publication, as well as by the perusal of the documents, the records and the long-buried letters of the whole world. All this has revolutionized history, and must change the thought of millions.

No government which possesses manuscripts but has at length yielded them to the patient labor of the men and women who

guard the future, the writer who makes plain what the world has been, that we may not stumble in the world which is to be. Every ducal palace, every governmental bureau, every country manor, every peasant home is being literally ransacked for tidings of the past, and all this is poured into print with as great fervor and relentless speed as if another and greater French Revolution were upon us and all the originals were to be destroyed.

It is inevitable that, with a fuller knowledge, many of the conclusions drawn by elder writers should undergo marked change, perhaps not so much in the mitigation of villainy, or the adulation of virtue, as in the clearer sight of causes and effects,—what may be termed the physics of history. Both in character and volume history has changed. How much only its custodians know.

For the first, one may turn to the True George Washington and Real Benjamin Franklin — works in every one's mouth ;

that is, in every one's beyond the coal-breaker boy, and they would not be beyond him but for a new slavery that has arisen upon the earth. A new sin which has had its counterpart, but never its like upon the earth before.

In its volume and exact recording of causes and effects, the change has been astounding and incalculable. For the last, one may speak of the oft-quoted and solemnly inculcated statement that William Penn's treaty with the Indians was the only one never broken, because of the strict justice and tolerant kindness of the early Quaker proprietors toward the savages. The cause of all this, as John Fiske, one of our greatest modern historians, has conclusively shown, was the cruel conquering of the tribes of the seaboard by their fierce enemies of kindred blood, the Five Nations, who at the time of Penn's settlement had more than half exterminated them, and had bound the survivors in the bonds of a cruel slavery which left them subject to

any newcomers. They were bound by oath which if broken meant annihilation by their foes, to bear no arms and to pursue only the occupations of squaws or Indian women. It is small wonder and small glory compared with that which he has been receiving with so much complacency for two hundred and fifty years that the founders of our wealthy commonwealth will get from revised history.

But in volume, in torrent, in mass, in extent, and in breadth and painstaking detail, in a distribution of fertile fact, which, like an inundation of the Nile, has covered the earth, no subject of modern thought and study, except science, equals it.

The production of literature varies comparatively little from age to age; in all countries allowing thought and record its blossoming is sure. Its value differs amazingly; so much that, dazzled by the radiance of the spacious days of the great Elizabeth and our late Victorian era, we forget that, though less highly valued, the dismal inter-

regnums had almost as many poets and prosifiers.

Do not misunderstand when I say that never has there been so great a forest of history. Records, made as records should be, in bare, simple and concise form, easily tabulated,— these, invaluable as they are and will continue to be, — are not history. They are only the materials of history. Literature may have fact or imagination for its foundation; it blossoms to truth and beauty from either stem. Would that it were always the good as well as the true and the beautiful!

History is the orderly and systematic presentation of the sequence of facts with a view to their important bearing upon future thought and conduct. Literature has, or should have, ethical fitness — the sanction of true religion; but beyond that its tangled blossoms may riot as fancy's pleasure is. Can history be derived from literature? Sometimes. It is a difficult matter; for, first, the literature as literature is destroyed, and the

resultant facts to be used as material collected as from dust — dry records for its use.

So great is the difference between literature and history! It is, I again repeat, not a mere matter of style, but of content, and that of history is of strict, definite purpose. Literature, like religion, persuades; history, like law, teaches.

Dealing sometimes with the same subjects, often with the same epochs, the distinction between them is not clearly seen. When it is, there will come the time for a difference in their teaching.

To me, who for years have been kept to another work, watching the special work of my desire in instruction done as best they could by others, has come a time when the desire to instruct those who must do what I no longer shall have power to do, to be what is the ideal of any worker in any field, a leader of a new and a better way to accomplish an important and honorable purpose, to teach history as it should be taught, with the modern mass of history before us.

However great the amount of literature in any language is or may be, the point of selection once passed, any portion may be taken by itself alone. One or twenty poems, plays or volumes, all precious,—it is a matter then only of hours, of tastes, of ability to choose for mental profit and for the soul's solace. We have many a teacher of literature, from the mother who sings the old ballad to her listening children and the primary teacher with her flock of children who with folded hands repeat their memory gems to the great ones of earth, poets themselves, who have taught themselves as they taught others song.

Just as it always has been taught, so literature must ever be taught, from the old beginnings onward. From the narrow rivulets and trickling streams and shining cascades of rippling song to the broad sea of Shakespeare's almost boundless mind and art.

History, as I have already said, is, in its plan, its purpose, its scope, different; moreover by the immense mass of new material

furnished by modern research, it has assumed a new character, taken on new aspects and shows new and unexpected features even in familiar places.

How shall the modern teacher deal with it? Every author has his own methods, but the well-equipped instructor of so important a branch as this has no one writer for his sole guide, else human liberty of thought were lost and human progress impeded.

To make a good beginning is imperative. To start with myth is to establish a false base—to present literature and not history,—and history is not a mere side growth from the literary stem; it is the indispensably secular and constructive. Comparing them both to pyramids, literature never quite comes down to the ground; it would not be literature if it did, but its mouth is towards us like a huge trumpet, its apex in the clouds, and through it may come the immediate voice of God to man. To study literature we begin by studying its beginnings and its pro-

ducers. To study it in its entirety is to study the spirit of God Himself, and to study it individually is to study the soul of man. History began only with the civilization of man and the keeping of unimpassioned record for no purpose of partisanship ; and not for praise only, but for the steady protection and progress of mankind. From the world around us, and from what has been, we find our history to be made.

This distinction at last, in these later years, having been clearly made between literature and history, but one thing follows, and must follow in the course of time — that is, difference in their teaching. Heretofore all has been considered literature and has been so taught, from myth to modern song.

History stands now, clear and distinct, by itself and should be taught from the present back to its sources, with a contemporary survey at every step.

Beginning with the present state of manners and men, in whatever country or clime,

all available records should contribute to the understanding of the production of the present age. That, before being studied, takes us farther back, and so, going, we gain a philosophy and depth of knowledge otherwise unreachd.

For history is not the beautiful artificial thing that literature is — literature which is true or should be true to ethics only, and which soars with free and rainbow wing above the realm of fact. History marches, like the armies of Napoleon, in solid platoons and columns along the highways of fact, and falls, if it must fall, every man in his place, defeated only in the invasion of the dark, barbaric past.

All history should be taught backwards, to give its full effect and importance. When the world really comprehends the vast acquisitions it has made in the last thirty years, it will be so done.

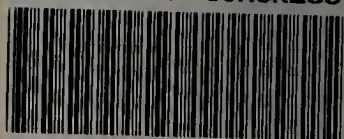
That I have not done it myself, is no fault of mine. The teacher's desk has been

mine for twenty years, but other and less congenial tasks allotted me have left no opportunity for a life's cherished design.

MARY E. B. EMERY.

Lynn, Mass., U. S. A., 1903.

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